

EDUCATION

The Public School System in the City of Newark is in a state of crisis, brought about by a combination of factors. These include overcrowded classrooms, aging and inadequate physical plants, a serious shortage of qualified teachers, a public image which makes the recruiting of new teachers difficult, a system of examinations which inhibits mobility within the system and makes it difficult to recruit top administrative personnel from without the system, and a bureaucratic structure which inhibits meaningful innovation and change: The dropout rate is among the highest in the nation; and finally a capital budget totally inadequate to deal with the building requirement made by the size and nature of the school population of the city.

The Governor's Committee recommended a state take-over of the Public School System in Newark as a possible solution to the crisis in which the Commission found the school system. That recommendation has caused considerable controversy, and whether or not it will be implemented is up for serious question at this point. Even if the recommendation is eventually implemented, it will certainly be a long time before it happens.

In the meantime, the crisis in Newark's public schools continues to escalate. It is clear to all concerned that our students generally perform at considerably lower levels than the national norms. Industry recruiters have found a large percentage of the graduates of the public schools to be functionally illiterate, unable to pass the entrance examinations for the lowest entry jobs. This crisis demands that immediate, creative and innovative steps be taken to bring about some change in this situation. There are several programs which can be undertaken by industry, and the net effect of these is to build a working partnership between business and schools which will accrue to the benefit of both.

The First of these is the commitment of human and financial resources to the

establishment of Street Academies. This program, operational in Harlem after eleven years of research and four years of actual successful operation, is designed to get the ghetto dropout back into school. Examine for a moment the importance of this in Newark. Surveys show that the dropouts are all too often the brightest of the students, but are bored and unchallenged. Others have called the ghetto dropout "social dynamite." This paragraph from the U.S. Riot Commission Report substantiates that characterization..."The typical rioter was a teenager or young adult, a lifelong resident of the city in which he rioted, a high school dropout..He was proud of his race, extremely hostile to both whites and middle-class Negroes, and although uninformed about politics, highly distrustful of the political system." This is precisely the teenager to which the Street Academy offers a positive alternative. What is the role of business here? The State Legislature, in an unprecedented move, appropriated about half a million dollars to assist in the establishment of a Street Academy program in New Jersey. Each storefront Academy however, needs the sponsorship of one company...or even the joint sponsorship of more than one. This entails a tax deductible financial grant, and active advisory involvement, with the full managerial resources of the company available to assist "their" Academy.

It is somewhat ironic to note that for several years now, Harlem Street Academy youngsters have been bused to Newark every day to attend Newark Preparatory School on lower Broad Street, because Newark Prep has developed a philosophy and program and faculty which has proved most successful in bringing these kids back into the mainstream of opportunity. Think of the irony...that we have a resource such as Newark Prep right here, but it is forced to provide its unique services to Harlem because we have no such program.

A second consideration is the construction by private industry of schools which can then be leased to the Public School System under the provisions of

the New Jersey law signed by Governor Hughes in July which authorizes such lease-backs on terms up to forty years. Utilization of new building techniques, such as the School Construction Systems Development in California, would permit the rapid construction of school buildings at costs considerably lower than traditional plans now require. Such a program would make available school facilities without cutting into the Board of Education's woefully inadequate capital funds. Imagine how important this would be in a city which is now more than 10,000 seats short of the number required for the size of the school population. In such a new facility, built utilizing the expertise and financial resources of industry, controlled experiments using the latest teaching devices could be undertaken; experience in community coordination and control could be developed. Quite aside from the educational values possible here, the psychological impact in a community which stands almost continually in conflict with the educational establishment would be immeasurable.

There is another possibility which warrants serious consideration by the business community...the "school and industry partnership" concept, such as Michigan Bell Telephone has developed with the ghetto-based Northern High School in Detroit. Operated jointly by the Detroit Board of Education and Michigan Bell, the corporate staff people have helped prepare students for the world of work, and have aided teachers and administrators in providing high quality, relevant education. The company's best interests are being served, since they are recruiting directly from the school. At the same time, the problem-solving ability of American business is bringing efficiency and relevance to a public ghetto school.

The Newark educational crisis boils just beneath the surface at another level. I'm sure that most of you are aware of the success of the Newark Pre-School Council program, funded by OEO to provide a learning-preparation for poverty

youngsters. Designed to give them at least an equal chance when they enter the public school system, this program in Newark and similar ones across the nation have been hailed as perhaps the most successful of the anti-poverty programs. Over the past two years, however, almost half a million dollars has been cut out of the pre-school program here because of politically motivated economy moves in Washington. It is probable that there will be even further cuts in the federal funding, and at best it is unpredictable.

Under such circumstances, two alternatives are readily apparent. The first is to permit, through inaction, the strangulation and eventual death of the program. The second is for the business community to provide the leadership to develop a campaign to raise from the private sector the money necessary not only to continue this program, but to dramatically expand it.

There is one final educational situation which requires immediately a commitment of the human resources in the business community. The Mayor and Board of Education have recently announced an 87-million dollar school construction plan, which has been hailed as a major breakthrough in our school facility problems. An examination of the plans, however, raises the question of the soundness of these plans, and whether or not this isn't basically the same building program which was announced in September of 1965 at a cost of 40 million dollars. It is my feeling that the Board of Education would welcome an evaluation of all of the aspects of this plan by experts in real estate, finance, engineering, and architecture, and government, which could be provided by the business community. I can say without reservation that the parents and taxpayers of the city would consider this a major contribution to the future of the school system.